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Youth Leadership Development in the Activism Context: a Case Study of the Wilder Youth Leadership Initiative

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YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE ACTIVISM CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF THE WILDER YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

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Abstract

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE ACTIVISM CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF THE WILDER YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

SUSAN PHILLIPS

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In conducting this research I investigated the effectiveness of youth leadership development programming in the Wilder Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI), a program located in St. Paul, Minnesota. For this qualitative case study, I used participant observation, semi-structured interviews and a survey to explore the development and demonstration of specific leadership capacities and skills (communication and interpersonal skills, analytical and critical functioning, decision making skills, personal identity, project management, reflection, and sense of empowerment) among youth participants. I also explored the programmatic structures that facilitate Youth Leadership Development(in the context of a cause chosen by youth, explicit outcomes, developmentally appropriate experiences, youth assessment and feedback, varied learning methods, follow up and ongoing support, communication with families, well trained and supervised staff, and skill practice, action, membership, and modeling,) Based upon this research, I discuss the effectiveness of youth development programming that, in addition to building skills, provides for authentic voice and the practice of leadership.

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Introduction

In many ways, youth in our society are second class citizens, subjected to hostile laws and unfair policies, with few rights or powers to change them. "For the most part, our culture places youth in powerless situations with no meaningful role other than as consumers," reasoned Kress (2006, p. 51). Young people are especially vulnerable to marketing and popular culture influences that perpetuate stereotypes. Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) contended that girls "experience a conflict between what they know and what they are permitted and expected to express outwardly. The resulting forced containment results in a silencing of voice" (p. 206). It is difficult to influence others if you are without voice, confused about who you are and where you fit in.

With the exception of prison inmates and a few other institutionalized groups, young people are more controlled than any other group in society. Bell (1995) defined *adultism* as "behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement" (para. 2). Adultism is manifested and sustained throughout customs, attitudes, social institutions and laws. Young people are told what to do and when to do it. Their emotions and thoughts are considered immature and not valued. Their futures are determined by adult measures that don't account for youth voice. When youth are unable to rise above this dynamic, they are blamed for their failures. While we all experience adultism in our own youth, once we are adults, we become perpetrators of adultist attitudes and actions. Adultism further silences the voice of youth or even their capacity to find authority

because youth internalize the oppression and begin to see themselves as less worthy, less capable, and less able to contribute.

Youth are often conceptualized as either problems or possibilities, both ideas detracting from their ability to engage as leaders in their present state. Youth leadership development is currently popular within the more general field of youth development. Many of the justifications for doing youth leadership development are framed in terms of intervention or prevention of high risk behaviors (Zeldin, 2002). In intervention programming a young person is often viewed as "simply one issue or problem or one set of skills" (Kress, 2006, p. 48). Leadership skills are multi-dimensional and lost in this perspective.

Kouzes and Posner (2006) argued "leadership is an observable, learnable set of practices" (p. 3). "Great Man" theories of leadership have been largely discarded for a broader vision of leadership, one of understanding influence in a more holistic and collective way. Leadership development programs geared toward adults focus both on skill development and practice. Youth leadership development programming tends to focus solely on building skills they will need to be effective leaders later in life. While these experiences, from a positive youth development perspective, help youth develop self esteem, confidence, and important social competencies, they continue to focus on youth as problems. Some programs are beginning to focus on youth as assets to communities, rather than liabilities. There is a call to "see youth for what they have to offer, not just what they need" (MacNeil, 2006, p.31).

MacNeil (2006) claimed that, in the volumes that have been written about leadership theory, development and practice, youth are noticeably absent. Both popular and scholarly writers focus on adult leadership development and practice. When youth are mentioned, it is with a future orientation (p.30). Kress (2006) suggested "one of the great barriers to cultivating

leadership among youth is the treatment of them solely as the next generation, As a result, youth fail to see themselves as actors in decision making processes today" (p. 54). Young people are bombarded with popular media sources that send a message of leadership as celebrity. Reality television reinforces the idea that competition, individualism, and drama lead to celebrity status and wealth. What message do our young people hear when a reality TV star is invited to speak at the Harvard Commencement? van Linden and Fertman (1998) found that "adolescents might concede that they change a friend's point of view on a certain subject, or that their friends listen to them. But when asked if he or she influences decisions, an adolescent is apt to answer, "Well, not really"" (p. 7). Even when teenagers do have influence they might not identify themselves as leaders.

Traditionally youth leadership development training has been framed as an intervention or prevention of risky behaviors. Zeldin and Camino (1999) are among some youth development researchers who have suggested a new framework that focuses on "the role of youth as problem solvers, not problems to be solved; youth as assets to communities, not liabilities" (p.10). They defined youth leadership development as "the provision of experiences, from highly structured to quite informal, that help young people develop [a set of competencies that allow young people to lead others over the long term]" (p.11). MacNeil (2006) found in her review of youth leadership literature, that many researchers focused solely on ability (skills, knowledge, and talents), while literature describing adult leadership, in contrast, addressed ability, but focused more on what she called authority (voice, influence, and decision making power) (p.32). She proposed that if we see the negative construct of 'youth as a social problem' as itself a form of oppression (i.e. ageism or adultism), a shift in power balance will be required to give youth opportunities that focus on *both* ability and authority. She called for additional research on organizational or

community outcomes resulting from youth leadership. She believed this is necessary to shift thinking "from the concept of youth leadership as 'good for youth' to a concept of youth integration into leadership roles as 'good for all'" (p. 35).

Ginwright, Cammarota, and Noguera (2005) proposed five vital points that will contribute to the advancement of theory and policy making for youth in urban communities. They presented theories related to the importance of building both the youth's individual identity and an understanding of their socio-political-economic context. They advocated a social justice youth policy that "supports community based social capital for young people and their collective ability to affect change in their schools and communities" (p. 36). As a context for their theories, they provided a brief history of student-led school reform in California from 1991 to 2001, and came to the conclusion that, "as collective actors, these groups mobilized specific forms of social capital in their neighborhoods to facilitate change in their schools and communities" (p. 35). They presented themes that are found throughout the literature related to youth-led activism and youth leadership development: the importance of identity and understanding of socio-political forces as well as the collective nature of leadership in these contexts.

Delgado and Staples (2008) found that youth development approaches in community based programs have placed a unique emphasis on increasing "the leadership capacities, critical consciousness, and skills of young people" (p.111). They argued that the field of youth-led organizing should focus on three critical elements of leadership: knowledge and awareness, community and collective identity, and shared vision. Effective youth leaders must have the ability to influence and inspire others in a variety of situations. Delgado and Staples identified the characteristics of effective youth leaders as patience, open mindedness, critical thinking

skills, desire and ability to commit time to a cause, anger at social injustice, belief in the ability to effect change, questioning of the status quo, ability to work with peers and various social systems, willingness to work with adult allies, eagerness to learn, willingness to take calculated risks, and a willingness to mentor (p 118-125). They concluded that these characteristics can be learned and developed through "direct experience, mentoring, popular education, consciousness raising, observation, dialogue, reflection, reading, the arts, workshops, conferences, and structured leadership training programs" (p.117). This list represents many of the strategies and activities contained in the leadership development programs evaluated in case studies and also discussed in theoretical essays.

Fertman and van Linden (1999) believed "every adolescent has latent leadership abilities" (p. 9). What happens when ageism is defeated and youth are given authentic voice along with skill development? Are more effective leaders shaped? What programming structures optimize skill development in addition to authentic voice? In this research I will investigate the effectiveness of a St. Paul, Minnesota based program, The Wilder Youth Leadership Initiative, in creating youth leadership development opportunities that actually go beyond skill development and give youth authentic authority – voice, influence, and decision making – in a social change or activist context. I examine the programming to see if these experiences, indeed, develop competent young leaders.

Literature Review

In this review I summarize studies of youth leadership within community action service learning, and youth-adult partnership contexts. Then, I examine the intersection between Positive Youth Development theory and youth leadership development, as well as the research in which youth are considered as present leaders. Three different frameworks emerge in the present

leader context – the stages of development, competencies acquired, and the experiential process involved in youth leadership development.

Youth Leadership Development in a Community Action Context

Community Action or Community Organizing contexts have a primary goal of creating change at a local level. Often young people are organized to fight for change in the school system or to advocate for community based supports that respond to specific issues. Leadership development for the youth involved in those efforts is often viewed as a secondary outcome, and no particular programming structure is embraced in order to further skill development. However; these settings give authentic voice and can be powerful in providing an environment for youth leadership development to occur.

Daily (2003, 2004) did a case study of youth organizing branch of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NBCCC) and evaluates the Sistahs and Brothers United (SBU) program using standard organizing measurements – "turnout, leadership development, general organizational development, victories, etc." (p. 95). SBU built, through recruiting activities, a "diverse membership of 300 teenagers in five years" with a core group of 40 youth who attended weekly meetings and took on leadership roles (p. 96). The youth were organized to engage in actions to influence educational reform. Early SBU campaigns focused on issues related to facilities and security at schools. After gaining public recognition and building a core leadership group, SBU turned its focus to improving classroom instruction. SBU youth worked with partners in the community to provide teacher training on student engagement and rigor in the high schools and helped design a quality control tool for teacher's to use as an evaluation of teaching methods. SBU's efforts have won over $3 million in traffic and street improvements, contributing to the safety of children traveling to and from school, and over $2.5 million in

school facility improvements, demonstrating "youth organizing can achieve significant policy change" (p. 95). Granted these are small scale and very local policy changes, but they have meaning for the daily lives of the youth of that community. Daily does not define leadership for this context, or what skills are important for youth leaders to possess, nor what particular experiences enhance youth leadership development. She does claim NWBCC had "developed serious teenage leaders who have the capacity to lead not only issue campaigns but also in areas of organizational culture and management" (p. 100). In addition she finds that youth leaders stay involved for multiple years, that their day-to-day time commitment often exceeds adult leaders, and that youth leaders set a standard for adults "in both their willingness to do the hard work of base building (door knocking, one-on-one meetings, etc.) and their willingness to work in teams and share decision making power" (p. 100). Daily does not share her methodology in any detail, nor does she discuss the ways in which the adults involved engage the youth. Skill development appears to be a by-product of organizing efforts.

In contrast to Daily's work, Kirshner (2008) completed an exhaustive qualitative study on three youth led activist organizations, systematically studying the teaching practices engaged by each group and how those relate to the degree and depth of authentic leadership afforded the participants. Using both an educational perspective and an interpretive ethnographic approach in his observations and interviews, he relied on four sources of data: observations of program activities, observations of special events, semi-structured interviews with youth and adults, and program artifacts. He used a conceptual lens of guided participation (p. 61) to examine the teaching practices employed and found three different approaches that influence the youth's opportunities to lead – facilitation, apprenticeship and joint work (p. 65). Kirshner finds that facilitation and apprenticeship activities were more youth centered than joint work. Youth

centered activities included "team builders designed to foster group belonging, workshops designed to improve youth's skills or understanding, and participant structures such as small groups designed to encourage participation from all" (p. 75). Collective decision making was a theme he finds across the youth-led and youth centered activities. The facilitation style was the purest in terms of actual and authentic opportunities for youth to lead, but because of the tendency of adults to step back, the youth miss, according to Kirshner, an opportunity to work along with more seasoned activists and pursue a campaign with clear objectives (p.80). Apprenticeship activities afford youth more extensive practice developing and implementing campaign strategies. Joint work, he finds, did little to position youth as leaders: adults facilitated 90% of the activities and rarely did the work include skill building workshops and efforts to foster group belonging. Kirshner's work points out the need for the adults in charge of programming to be very intentional about their role in developing youth leaders.

Yu and Lewis-Charp (2006) examine a number of youth leadership development programs that "have expanded their focus from the individual to the community level" (p. 7). Interested in the idea that "young people's involvement in their communities not only helps them build leadership skills" (p.7), but also allows youth to expand their knowledge of and access to community based resources; they focused on programs that looked at the skills developed in that context. The programs studied emphasize "leadership skills such as the ability to listen, empathize, cooperate, build consensus, and subsume personal interests and ideas to the collective" (p. 9). Yu and Lewis-Charp echo Kirshner's finding regarding the presence of collective decision making when they conclude "it is the experience of cause-based, collective, and visible action that transforms a youth group into a youth leadership team" (p. 8).

Luluquisen, Trinidad, and Ghosh (2006) conducted a qualitative review of a youth leadership development program in Hawaii called Sariling Gawa and also found evidence of shared leadership. In using a case study approach, the authors collected data from documents, key informant interviews, focus groups and participant observation. They categorize self-reported skills learned into four categories: life and social skills, leadership skills, communication skills, and identity and personal development. Sariling Gawa was founded by a group of college students who began to reflect, analyze, and act on their experiences of being "immigrant, Filipino, and young in Hawaii" (p. 58). Sariling Gawa offers three program components: youth leadership development (training in non-profit management, leading groups, community mobilization, communication and decision making), identity development (related specifically to Filipino culture and community), and partnerships with other Filipino community based organizations that provide opportunities for participation in a variety of projects. Sariling Gawa exhibits a tendency toward "shared leadership and shared workloads" (p. 62). The authors find that the program's structure promotes a sense of belonging and allows for collective action, and that many of the youth participants became leaders in both a variety of Filipino civic and community organizations, as well as broader community organizations such as the YMCA, Boy Scouts of America, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Hawaii Jaycees (p. 67).

Otis (2006) conducted a case study analysis of the Lexington Youth Leadership Academy (LYLA), a leadership development and community change program, in which she evaluates the program's impact on youth participants, community change activities, and adult community leaders. Data were gathered through interviews and focus groups held with 21 youth who had been involved with LYLA for at least two years. Otis finds that youth "experienced a notable shift in their commitment to community change as their involvement in the project increased" (p.

81). Involvement was broken down into three phases: development and capacity building, application of new skills in peer and hypothetical situation, and using skills to create community change. Youth were engaged through an empowerment framework that provided popular education (opportunities to learn history and systems of oppression) and promoted consensus decision making (decisions made collectively and through a consensus building process rather than voting). LYLA linked growth and skill development with authentic opportunities for community change; and, according to Otis, not only did youth increase skills and motivation for leadership, but change efforts were successful and the adults involved walked away from the experience with a different attitude towards young people.

It is common for community action programs to focus on outcomes that measure campaign success, rather than leadership development. Because leadership development is not the primary focus, as in SBU, programmatic structures are not intentionally designed to create the optimal environment for skill development in addition to authentic voice. Skill development becomes a secondary outcome that is neither well tracked nor measured. However; community action campaigns that are youth led can be a powerful vehicle for youth leadership development, especially if youth are able to choose the cause they want to address. In addition, community action contexts increase the youth's capacity to build consensus and make collective decisions. Clear and intentionally defined adult roles can create opportunities for authentic voice and spaces to practice skills as they are developed.

Youth Leadership Development in a Service Learning Context

Service learning is similar to, yet different from community action. Service learning often involves youth leaders going into a different community, while community action engages youth in their own context. Yip (2006) writes about the experiences of the Center for Creative

Leadership in studying youth leadership development. He argues that leadership development is "too important a process to leave to chance. Leadership, like any other skills, needs to be taught, developed, and practiced" (p. 12). Yip suggests that adults learn and develop as leaders most often in the context of their workplace, while youth develop leadership skills in the context of a community, an interest group, or a service project. He claims that leadership development for youth in a service context helps youth "gain a sense of agency and a sense of responsibility for addressing society's problems" (p. 12). In this case, community service can provide a context for authentic youth voice and decision making.

Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) investigate the youth leadership experiences of adolescent girls who participated in a feminist-based program, and like Yip, find community service creates an important leadership context. They use a grounded theory approach to understand changes for the participants (p. 203). The programming provided involved a six week curriculum that "focused on leadership exploration through education, observation, and action" (p. 207). The educational models used included "rigorous coursework, multi generational mentoring, and service learning" (p. 207). In these models diverse examples of leadership combined with consciousness raising information and the provision of a safe space for exploration appear to strengthen the voices of teenage girls (p. 217). Hoyt and Kennedy conclude that "participation in community service leads to political identity development by providing youth with an opportunity to envision the self and the society they wish to create" and that such experiences "inspired youth to confront social problems and become engaged in social action" (p. 206).

Teasley, Tyson and House (2007) call attention to the absence of empirical research on leadership development in youth and state their interest in assessing factors related to leadership development for African American teens participating in a community service program designed

to develop young leaders. In addition, they go a step further than previously discussed authors as they propose to examine links between self esteem and leadership. The urban program where they conduct their research is primarily a training institute and the curriculum focuses on three outcomes: personal growth, career search, and community development. Internships and community service projects supplement the training activities. The authors survey 345 youth about their leadership development traits and self esteem. The skills identified by the participants were categorized in to three areas:

> (1) Personal leadership characteristics (high energy, intelligence, positive attitude, assertiveness, self-confidence, ability to express feelings, humor, ability to control inappropriate emotions, openness, empathy, and creativity);
>
> (2) Personal relationship skills (encouraging, listening, providing feedback, questioning, praising, mediating, maintaining discipline, teaching, and training);
>
> (3) Task accomplishment leadership skills (elaborating, initiating, coordination, communicating, information seeking, information giving, gaining content knowledge, analyzing, summarizing, diagnosing, managing, and evaluating) (p. 12).

The Hare Self Esteem Scale was used to measure self esteem. This scale measures adolescents' feelings about their worth and importance among peers, as students, and as family members

The authors conclude that for young women, program activities had less impact on skills development and self esteem than positive peer relationships did. For young men, they find that the sense of self-esteem gained through family relationships is a significant indicator of the presence of the leadership traits listed above. Because program activities primarily revolved

around a training institute, and the service projects were supplemental, it is unclear how much authentic voice and decision making power youth actually had. Program effectiveness is negatively impacted when youth have fewer opportunities to practice leadership skills in real life situations.

Engagement in community service learning projects helps young people develop a sense of self in a large context and can inspire youth to further social action. A strong personal identity and a strong sense of mission are important leadership characteristics, but not the whole picture. Unless they are intentionally structured to build skills and give young people an authentic leadership role in designing those service projects, such programming is less likely to develop youth leadership capacities.

Youth Leadership Development within Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth-adult partnerships occur when young people and adults become engaged together in their communities. Youth-adult partnerships are unique in that there is mutuality in teaching, learning, and action between youth and adults. Ideally, power is equally distributed between youth and adults in these structures. As Kirshner (2008) finds, adults can take charge and not share facilitation or decision making responsibilities with young people. However, there is increasing evidence that Youth-adult partnerships can develop young leaders and create community change.

Finn and Checkoway (1998) conducted a pilot study of 10 community based youth initiatives across the US "in which young people were active participants in solving problems, planning programs, and providing services at the community level" (p. 335). Collectively, with adults and youth they created a list of criteria to be used in selecting the organizations to be studied. The criteria developed included the level of youth involvement, capacity building,

collaboration, cultural awareness, leadership development, demonstration of continuity, comprehensiveness, and change orientation (p. 337). They conducted site visits to the 10 community based programs chosen for participation, where they gathered information through interviewing participants, gathering documentary data, and participating themselves in program activities. While the community based programs were diverse, reflecting regional, cultural, socioeconomic, and rural-urban differences, Finn and Checkoway find common themes. "These initiatives focus on youth leadership development by providing practical skills for effective, life-long civic participation" they assert (p. 343). Another common theme was the use of intergenerational and collective leadership. They conclude that these youth-adult partnerships were effective in leadership development and argue that "youths develop knowledge through mentoring, competence through practice of skills, and confidence in themselves as they tackle progressively more demanding responsibilities in a context of group support " (p 343).

In 2003, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) conducted a multi-level evaluation of a three year learning collaborative involving twelve youth-led civic activism organizations and the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development called the Youth Leadership Development Initiative (YLDI). They employed a mixed method study collecting qualitative data through interviews, observations and extensive reviews of program level documents as well as a quantitative analysis involving two waves of youth surveys. For the qualitative study they conducted two rounds of site visits lasting 2-3 days to each YLDI site. During the site visits the team:

- Conducted discussions with program leaders to learn about their theory of change, program vision, staffing, organizational capacity needs, and program design and services.

- Conducted individual and focus group discussions with youth participants and youth leaders to learn about their experiences in the program and contextual influences.
- Observed program activities and community organizing events to learn about the range of activities available to youth and to further provide context for the evaluation.
- "Shadowed" youth participants to understand the community through their eyes.
- Reviewed program documentation

Program documents, site visit notes, and interview transcripts were synthesized into 40-60 page analytic site profiles of each of the twelve organizations. During cross-case analysis, data from each of the organizations were coded and thematic data matrices were created.

For the quantitative component of the study two waves of surveys were administered. The YLDI Youth Survey consists of measures of youth development, civic activism, identity and coping. SPR develops multi-item civic activism scales, and uses a "threshold analyses" to analyze the survey data which examine the results in terms of youth's experiences measured against a standard, rather than mean levels.

In addition they employed participatory evaluation strategies, engaging organizational leaders and youth in various aspects of tool development and data collection, including training young people as "youth ethnographers" and having them interview their peers. SPR employs several strategies for maintaining validity that included feedback from participants, feedback from an external advisory group and other researchers, as well as involving eight different researchers. Validity stems from the variety of perspectives and interpretations. The researchers also design the evaluation with several core elements that helped increase validity: data triangulation, consistency and clarity in evaluation constructs through the creation of formal

protocols and mapped constructs, case study design that included multiple sites, and multiple rounds of data collection.

Their findings echo many of the themes suggested by other researchers (Yu and Lewis-Charp, 2006, Luluquisen et al., 2006, Yip, 2006, Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008) such as the importance of identity formation and a sense of belonging. They also found that civic activism provides youth not only with learning and skill building experiences, but, most critically, with applied leadership opportunities. SPR concurs with Kirshner (2008) and other researchers that adults need to step back, but not tune out completely. They also find, agreeing with Delgado and Staples (2008) that popular education, as well as a dual focus on individual and community change to be critical elements in effective leadership development and successful change campaigns. Overall SPR concludes that youth organizing groups were considerably more successful than general youth development programs at involving youth in decision making and leadership. They find that these organizations report rates of these phenomena three times higher than other youth development organizations (p.91). SPR, in attempting to evaluate intermediate community change goals, identifies a number of key community outcomes including the number of youth on city governance bodies and the number of youth involved in creating draft policy (p.114). They document some community "wins" that involved official reallocation of public resources and favorable policy changes.

Youth-adult partnerships can be effective in developing youth leaders within an activism context. Youth-adult partnerships straddle the worlds of community action and leadership development. Clear adult roles and intentional skill development outcomes will greatly impact the effectiveness of youth-adult partnerships in developing young leaders.

Intersections with Youth Development

Positive youth development is a comprehensive framework outlining the supports young people need in order to be successful. Youth development emphasizes the importance of focusing on youths' strengths instead of their risk factors. According to the National Research Council (2002) programs that support and promote the positive development of youth exhibit the following characteristics: physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill-building, and the integration of family, school and community efforts.

Kress (2006), believes that "successful leaders are defined by knowledge, competency, and character", and asserts "leaders require 'character capacity'" (p. 46). She analyzes the intersection between youth leadership development and general youth development and finds many overlaps between developing leaders and developing youth. Kress argues that youth development, with its more holistic approach, is a response to a rapidly changing society with fewer opportunities for youth and less sense of community. She declares

> ...the outcomes of youth development are based on experiences and include complex dynamics, such as the development of character, citizenship, and leadership – things that cannot be taught didactically. This idea that some things … must be learned through experience is a key element of youth development (p. 48).

She also advocates that the line between youth development and youth leadership development not be blurred, claiming "opportunities for youth to experience independence and autonomy and to extend their influence are important elements of youth development, but they are not the primary elements" (p. 50). Leadership is a potential outcome of youth development, but not the only potential outcome. Kress defines youth leadership as "the involvement of youth

in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and decision making" (p. 51). She rejects didactic educational models that forget leadership is a developmental idea rather than a "position of commodity" (p. 52). In this she is reminding us that leadership is not positional. While Kress advocates for experiential, genuine leadership experiences for youth, she also cautions providers to find the "balance between actively engaging youth at their experience level and overwhelming them with too much responsibility." (p. 52). It is important that the components of youth development inform youth leadership development programming; evidence of this philosophy is common in the youth leadership development programs reviewed.

Youth as Leaders Today

An increasing number of researchers are looking at youth leadership development in contexts where youth have authentic voice and leadership roles. Some have proposed a framework of developmental stages; others have looked at youth leadership in terms of competencies and skills mastered. Some have concentrated on the experiential piece of youth leadership development programming. A hybrid of the three is likely the best approach.

Stages of Development Framework

Martinek, Schilling and Hellison (2006) conducted a program evaluation of youth leadership development in the context of value-based sports clubs, and completed a case study of the Youth Leader Corps (Greensboro) and the Apprentice Teacher Program (Chicago). These programs offered a "capstone experience" for sport club members, providing life skills education that reflected "five basic goals: (a) self-control and respect for the rights and feelings of others; (b) trying one's best and teamwork; (c) self-direction; (d) caring for and helping others; and (e) applying these goals outside the gym" (pp. 144-145). They argue that the data

supports the idea that leadership develops through various stages and that adolescents do not suddenly become leaders. They propose four stages of leadership development. The first stage is needs-based leadership. Youth leaders in this stage "are mainly focused on fulfilling their own needs rather than fulfilling their leadership role" (p. 147). The second stage is described as focusing on planning and teaching. In this stage, Martinek et al., note that the youth leader is

> ... focused on becoming an effective teacher, their connection to the program becomes mutually beneficial. The leader's self interests and personal needs begin to take a back seat to a commitment to help their campers and foster a positive relationship with them (p. 149).

Stage three is about reflective leadership. In this stage youth leaders are becoming proficient and confident teachers, moving "on to become reflective about their leadership role. Reciprocal learning takes place" (p. 151). The final stage is called compassionate leadership and is "where leaders begin to internalize an ethical concern for relationships with others" (p. 151). Behavior of youth leaders at this stage is demonstrated in three ways: "teaching compassion to others, teaching with compassion, and acquiring a service orientation outside of the gym" (p. 153). While the stages Martinek et al. developed describe specific skills and behaviors, most of their observations of participants see leadership in terms of demonstrating less aggressiveness on the court and see coaching activities as leadership activities. Unfortunately, they do not look for behaviors indicative of their final stage, assuming that none of the youth participants were "ready" (p. 153).

van Linden and Fertman (1998) argue that "leadership is a personal and developmental process" (p. 11). They define leaders as "individuals who think for themselves, communicate their thoughts and feelings to others, and help others understand and act on their own beliefs" (p.

17). Leaders, they write, influence others in ways that are ethically and socially responsible. Within this view of leadership they propose three stages of leadership development that differ from those created by Martinek et al.. Stage one "focuses on initial awareness of one's leadership potential and abilities" (p. 19). In stage two, youth leaders "expand and strengthen their potential abilities; in this stage we see growth in leadership skills and confidence solidified through interaction" (p. 19). Stage three is about mastering skills in more specific ways. van Linden and Fertman contend that movement through these stages is not necessarily linear and that leadership development is "a creative process characterized by bursts of energy, insight, and activity followed by periods of rest, distraction, and reflection" (p. 63).

Within each stage van Linden and Fertman identify five dimensions of learning and behavior: leadership information, leadership attitude, communication skills, decision making, and stress management (pp. 39-45). Within each stage "young people acquire leadership information and attitudes, and an array of interpersonal skills (communication, decision making, and stress management" (p. 19). They also define the qualities of leadership learning experiences that define successful programming based on 15 years of experience in the field:

- Learning experience is based in adolescent's needs and experiences
- Definition of leadership includes both transactional and transformative leadership
- Purpose is clearly stated
- Curriculum and materials are researched and tested
- Student assessment and feedback are offered
- There are multiple opportunities to practice skills
- Learning methods vary
- Follow-up and ongoing support are included

- Communication with schools, agencies, and families is emphasized
- Staff are well trained and supervised (p. 58).

They agree with Kress (2006) that leadership development programs for youth be grounded in experiential education – learning by doing and suggest that "activities that develop leadership must be challenging, providing teenagers with opportunities to test themselves against new and difficult tasks" (p. 53). Reflection is critical throughout each stage and is the practice that creates meaning and learning within experiences and allows young people to put their new knowledge and skills to work in everyday life in intentional ways.

van Linden and Fertman also observed that learning about leadership might not mean that youth feels like a leader, recognizes their own leadership skills, or even wants to be a leader (p. 6). This phenomenon is attributed to internalized adultism.

Stages of development frameworks do not alone explain the experience of youth leadership development, nor are they unique to leadership development among youth. Adult developing leaders also move through stages of self-and-other awareness and increased skills. But they can be helpful in creating activities that are developmentally relevant as youth move through the journey of becoming leaders. Viewing youth leadership as stages with some structure and intentionality can be helpful in creating activities that are developmentally relevant for youth as they move through the journey of becoming leaders.

Competencies Framework

Zeldin and Camino (1999) examine youth leadership development in five organizations whose programming was "fundamentally about collective action and social causes" (p.12). In contrast to Daily (2003, 2004), they examined the programmatic structures that enabled youth to acquire competencies, rather than community action victories. They employed qualitative and

ethnographic methodology and evaluate the programs over a four year period. Data were gathered in multiple ways – interviews, observations, focus groups and interactions with stakeholder groups. Zeldin and Camino define leadership as "a set of competencies that allow young people to lead others over the long term" (p. 11). They observe that the youth leadership development programs constructed experiences that helped young leaders acquire competencies in these five areas: communication, teamwork, personal identity, professionalism, and project management (p. 12). They develop a framework from the common struggles, responses, and successes in those programs called "CO-SAMM – Cause and Outcome, Skill and Action, Membership and Modeling" (p. 11). This framework is often illustrated when programming occurs in the context of a cause chosen by young people, when programming is geared toward an explicit set of outcomes, and when youth are developed in the context of day to day essential experiences that include skill building, action, membership and modeling (pp. 11-13).

Conner and Strobel (2007) follow two girls over three years as they participated in Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) program. They use an embedded case study approach to examine "links between leadership development and programmatic structures and supports" (p. 272), an approach similar to that of Zeldin and Camino (1999). Data from field notes are coded, triangulated, and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. They identify and look specifically for leadership capacities from three dimensions –communication and interpersonal skills, analytic and critical reflection, and positive community involvement, as well as the programmatic structures that supported the development of those capacities (p. 277). They note five lessons from their research:

- Leadership skills and capacities may not look alike
- Leadership takes time

- Praise and positive reinforcement go a long way
- Self-reflection and goal setting can support youth's growth as leaders
- Opportunities for growth and interactions with adults should be distributed equitably (pp. 291-293).

Connor and Strobel conclude "a broader, more flexible conceptualization of leadership can play to different youth's strengths, improving the likelihood that they will become engaged in...their communities in meaningful ways" (p. 294). In addition they urge providers of youth development experiences to "move away from individual, competitive, and incremental models of leadership toward a framework that accounts for group processes and collective action" (p. 276). A broader more flexible conceptualization of leadership can accommodate different youth's strengths and improve the likelihood that they will become engaged in their communities in meaningful ways. Their findings support embracing general youth development theory when creating youth leadership development programming, particularly in the areas of belonging/membership and opportunities for reflection.

Kouzes and Posner (2006) find, after two decades of leadership research, "leadership is an observable, learnable set of practices" (p. 3). They develop a framework of competencies they call "Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders" that they believe all exceptional leaders demonstrate (p. 3). These are:

1. Model the Way
    - Finding your voice by clarifying personal values
    - Setting example by aligning actions with shared values
2. Inspire a Shared Vision
    - Envisioning the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities

- Enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations

3. Challenge the Process
    - Searching for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow and improve
    - Experimenting and taking risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes
4. Enable Others to Act
    - Fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust
    - Strengthening others by sharing power and discretion
5. Encourage the Heart
    - Recognizing contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence
    - Celebrating the values and victories by creating a spirit of community (pp. 3-5).

From this framework of competencies, Kouzes and Posner develop the *Student Leadership Practices Inventory*, a tool to measure the extent to which a leader engages in those practices, thereby assessing current leadership skills. Kouzes and Posner's list of practices captures leadership skills at a more macro level, while Zeldin and Camino and Connor and Strobel identify similar capacities – communication, interpersonal skills, and team work – that are present at a micro level. These micro capacities, along with project management skills, analytic reflection, and personal identity create the foundation from which young leaders are able to live the Five Practices identified by Kouzes and Posner.

Programs that define the competencies they want youth to develop are better able to be intentional about creating specific learning opportunities and tracking the demonstration of those

skills. Generating a list of skills or competencies does not alone create a successful youth leadership development program. Competencies must be combined with a picture of leadership development as a process.

An Experiential Lens

Several of the authors reviewed above discussed the importance of experiential learning in youth leadership development. Lu and Lewis-Charp (2006) comment on the need for youth to have "opportunities to apply their leadership skills in real world settings around issues they care about" (p. 10). van Linden and Fertman (1998) assert that learning by doing happened when "activities provide real-life situations within which adolescents can learn more about their leadership skills while being guided by adult support and structure" (p. 53). In addition they argue that experiential learning requires structured opportunities to reflect upon what has been learned and how to apply this new knowledge (p. 132). In finding the connections between positive youth development and youth leadership development, Kress (2006) declares that settings where "skill development is encouraged through hands on participation" are ideal for both general youth development and leadership development (pp. 54-55).

Liu and Nadel (2006) argue that "practice makes perfect and knowledge comes with experience" (p. 13). They contend that important leadership lessons can be learned in many settings and that the "many experiences that teenagers face every day can be valuable," if supportive adults can think to leverage them for reflection (p. 13). Woyach (1996) surveyed, in multiple rounds, 25 leading practitioners in the field of youth leadership programming. From the data he finds agreement around a series of core principles that are reflective of previous authors discussed:

- Leadership programs should help youth learn specific knowledge and skills related to leadership,
- Programs should emphasize experiential learning and provide opportunities for genuine leadership,
- Involve youth in collaborative experiences, team work & networking with peers,
- Involve youth in significant relationships with mentors, positive role models, or other nurturing adults,
- Promote awareness, understanding and tolerance of other people, cultures, and societies (pp.1-2).

Experiential education is more than just "learning by doing." Experiential education is structured in a way that allows youth to explore the phenomenon of leadership - to form a direct relationship with the subject matter - rather than merely reading about the phenomenon or encountering it indirectly. Experiential learning, then, requires that the learner play an active role in the experience – leading - and that the experience is followed by reflection as a method for processing, understanding, and making sense of it.

Methodology

This study was designed to answer the following core research questions: is youth leadership development in an activist context effective? Do the participants develop leadership skills and attitudes because of the action orientation? How does the program structure support that development?

This research is grounded in the qualitative framework of a case study. "Case studies are the preferred approach when 'how' and 'why' questions are to be answered, when the researcher has little control over events and when the focus is on a current phenomenon in a real-life

context" (Yin, as cited in Klenke, 2008, p. 63). Given that leadership is often defined and shaped by the context, a case study approach is useful.

In this section I discuss the research strategies used and my rational for using them. I chose to conduct a case study, and collected data through participant observation of program activities, semi structured interviews, surveys, and a review of program artifacts. I conducted the research within the Wilder Foundation's Youth Leadership Initiative over the 2010-2011 academic year and used descriptive content analysis to examine the data.

Wilder Youth Leadership Initiative

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation is a non-profit health and human services organization founded by a philanthropic Saint Paul businessman, Amherst H. Wilder and his family more than 100 years ago. Wilder combines direct service, research, and community development to address the needs of the most vulnerable people in greater Saint Paul, Minnesota. The organization's mission is

> To promote the social welfare of persons resident or located in the greater Saint Paul metropolitan area by all appropriate means, including: relief of the poor, care of the sick and aged, care and nurture of children, aid of the disadvantaged and otherwise needy, promotion of physical and mental health, provision of needed housing and social services, operation of residences and facilities for the aged, the infirm and those requiring special care, and in general the conservation of human resources by the provision of human services responsive to the welfare needs of the community, all without regard to, or discrimination on account of, nationality, sex, color, religious scruples or prejudices (Wilder, 2011a).

Leadership Development Programming

Wilder has a long commitment to developing and supporting diverse, effective and principled community leadership. The Wilder Center for Communities works with individuals and organizations to introduce people to the fundamentals of civic involvement, to nurture and build the skills of emerging leaders, and to renew the energy and commitment of experienced leaders. To this end, Wilder supports three distinct leadership development efforts:

- The Neighborhood Leadership Programs provide training for people at a variety of ages and stages in their development to aid them in building knowledge, skills and commitment for effective community leadership.
- The James P. Shannon Leadership Institute provides proven leaders a rare chance for interdisciplinary reflection on the purpose and values their leadership serves and ways to reenergize their focus and commitment to service.
- The Youth Leadership Initiative provides young people, ages 14-18, from various cultural backgrounds with opportunities for self-assessment, cross-cultural interaction, leadership skills development, and meaningful engagement in the community (Wilder, 2011d).

Wilder's leadership programs are designed to be accessible to a diverse constituency. They are experiential in design and help individuals take action in a way that connects their own passion and values with others in the community they wish to serve.

The Youth Leadership Initiative

The Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) is a multicultural program designed to help youth develop strong, effective leadership skills to work in diverse community settings. The program assists youth in learning about themselves, working with others, and engaging in meaningful

action. The six building blocks of YLI are learning, community, action, culture, character, and leadership (YLI Program Brochure, 2010).

YLI aspires to four program goals:

- Develop youths' understanding of themselves and their culture,
- Equip youth with the knowledge, skills, and qualities needed for leadership,
- Encourage youths' appreciation for the culture of others and promote cross-cultural leadership,
- Build youth leadership through meaningful engagement in real community issues.

The program incorporates a wide range of alternative learning methods, including: experiential group learning activities, personal reflection and goal-setting, opportunities to take leadership, and skill-building through service projects in the community.

YLI has four major program activities: Leadership Retreats, Cultural Exploration Sessions, Action Teams, and School Support. In the fall of 2010, 88 youth between the ages of 14-18 committed to participate for the school year in these activities. Each of the three retreats lasts three days and two nights, were facilitated by Youth Mentors, and created a space where youth could explore concepts of leadership, strengthen cross-cultural relationships, and participate in experiential learning activities that focus on working effectively with others. Activities are designed so that youth also discover their values, aspirations, strengths, and communication styles. Youth meet monthly between retreats in culturally specific cohorts. Aided by a Cultural Coach, youth explore their culture and heritage and its impact on their leadership style and personal development. They explore stereotypes and prejudices, share their experiences, learn about the contributions of their cultural group, and find ways to be a change agent in their cultural community. Youth participate in weekly multicultural Action Teams that

focus on providing service to the community. The teams are organized around community issues that the youth wish to address. Each team explores the issue they have selected and develops a service project to address the issue. Action Team activities are designed so that youth gain real life experience in project planning and implementation, cross-cultural communication, and teamwork. School Support is provided weekly. Youth discuss the importance of education and receive structured support based on an Individual Education Plan developed for each youth. Youth set goals and begin preparing for higher education through attendance at monthly workshops provided in partnership with Scholarshop, a program of Scholarship America.

Eighty-eight youth ages 14-18 participated in the program in 2010-2011. Fifty-nine of those youth were female and 29 male. Seven of those youth identified as African American, five as Native African, two as Hispanic, 15 as Karen, three as Caucasian, 10 as Multiracial, two as Native American, and one as Middle Eastern. Two did not indicate a racial or ethnic identity.

In order to meet the varied developmental needs among the youth, YLI offers three levels of engagement: Participants, Emerging Leaders and Youth Mentors. Participants are youth involved for their first or second year. During the 2010-2011 program year five youth participated as Emerging Leaders. Second and third year participants, Emerging Leaders make a larger time commitment and have opportunities to practice planning and facilitation skills more formally. One of these was male and four were female. Three of the Emerging Leaders identified as Hmong, one as Karen, and one as Multiracial. There are also nine youth who participate as Youth Mentors. Youth Mentors share significant planning, decision making, and facilitation roles within YLI. They also receive a small stipend for their work. Among the nine Youth Mentors five are female and four are male. Three identify as Hmong, two as African

American, one as Filipino, and three as Multiracial. Six of the Youth Mentors were seniors in high school, two were juniors, and one was a sophomore.

Data Collection

Participant Observation

Participant observation was utilized as a method for gathering data. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) described participant observation as "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (p. 1). I signed up as a program volunteer, creating a setting in which this methodology could be fully engaged. In the role of friend/mentor I maintained less authority than many adults in the youth participant's lives. Such relationships are conducive to the development of trust, critical to the success of participatory observation with adolescents according, to Fine and Sandstrom (1988, p. 14).

Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) argued "the use of participant observation allows for greater rapport, better access to informants and activities, and enhanced understanding of the phenomena investigated using [a variety of] other methods" (p. 93). As a volunteer I was able to participate in a variety of program activities (Youth Mentor meetings, Leadership Retreats, Cultural Saturdays, and Action Teams) and special events, recording observations as field notes. Semi structured interviews, surveys, and program artifacts such as the organization website, curriculum manuals, funding applications and reports, in-house program evaluations and public relations materials were additional sources of data. Angrosino (2007) claimed "the use of multiple data collection techniques…reinforce[s] the conclusions" (p. 51).

Permissions

I obtained permission in writing from the Wilder YLI program leadership to conduct this study and, additionally, I was approved as a volunteer staff, passing criminal background and motor vehicle record checks. I obtained consent from the parents of the Youth Mentors and assent from the Youth Mentors themselves for observation, interviews and the survey. The experiences of the Youth Mentors represent the bulk of the data collected.

Observations

Over the 2010-2011 school year I conducted participant observations of the weekly Youth Mentors meeting. These observations totaled 41 three hour meetings for a total of 123 hours. In addition I made observations of five Youth Action team meetings, lasting 2 hours each for a total of 10 hours. I observed activities at three weekend long retreats, for a total of 86 hours. I also made observations at five Cultural Saturdays, each lasting seven hours, for a total of 35 hours. As a volunteer I was actually one of the Coaches for the European-decent Cultural Group, and most directly observed the interactions and activities with those youth, but in the openings and closings of each day, I was able to get a sense of what the other groups were experiencing. I also conducted observations at two special events: the Inspiration Dinner (an event planned by youth to honor an adult mentor in their lives) and a Thanksgiving Celebration.

During each observation I recorded what Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) called "jot notes or scratch notes" primarily as aids to memory (p. 144). Later I created expanded field notes that included a description of the physical context, the people involved, as much of their behavior and non-verbal communication as possible and in words as close as possible to the words used by the participants. I also recorded impressions, thoughts, concerns and explanations.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the nine Youth Mentors. The shortest of those was 15 minutes and the longest was 51 minutes, and the total time for all nine interviews was four hours. These semi-structured interviews included the following questions:

1. What are the most important things you learned through participating in YLI?
    a. About effective leadership?
    b. About your ability to affect change?
    c. About your own leadership skills?
    d. About yourself as a person?
2. Describe your Action Team activity:
    a. What did your team try to accomplish?
    b. How effective were you in reaching your goal? What went well? What could have been more effective?
    c. What was your role?
    d. How did you contribute to the team's success? What did you do well? How could you have been more effective?
3. What other opportunities did you have to practice your leadership skills?
    a. What other opportunities did you have to practice your leadership skills?
    b. In what ways have you been effective? How could you have been more effective?
    c. Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?
4. How have you changed as a result of participating in this program?

a. What are the most important changes you experienced as a result of participation?
b. How do you plan to continue using the skills you developed in this program?

These interview audio files were transcribed.

I also conducted informal interviews with staff that consisted of brief conversations during programming breaks that helped enhance my understanding of program offerings and the history of YLI. These conversations were recorded in field notes.

Official Records and Program Documents

Official Records and Program Documents were another source of information and included brochures, grant funding applications and reports, internally conducted program evaluation reports, Mentor Personal Development Check-in Forms, and transcriptions of answers to open-ended questions on a mid-year and final participant survey.

Survey

I administered a survey among the Youth Mentors in the spring. The survey was based on the Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale created by Dormody, Seevers, and Clason (1993). The survey collected self reported information regarding leadership skills from the Youth Mentors. This survey is found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Method

I utilized descriptive content analysis to examine data collected. Angrosino (2007) describes this process as a search for patterns to organize notes, using thematic categories drawn from the literature (p. 73). I read and reread field notes and transcriptions to align with a

process that Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) described as "an iterative process; there is no substitute for reading and rereading field notes and transcripts, each time with a particular question in mind" (p. 163). In the initial reads I looked for themes from the literature. I then tweaked these themes and reread notes, documents and transcriptions coding them according to themes related to youth's demonstration of capacities and activities where they practiced these skills. The capacities I coded for included communication and interpersonal skills, analytical and critical functioning, decision making skills, personal identity formation, project management skills, reflection practice, and a sense of empowerment.

I reread the notes again looking for themes related to program structure and supports. In an identical process, I revised my list of themes and then returned to read and code for the presence of those themes. The program structures I coded included: occurring in the context of a cause chosen by the youth, explicit outcomes, in the context of skill building or practice, action orientation, membership, emphasis on modeling, based on youth's experiences and needs, student assessment and feedback offered, learning methods vary, the presence of follow up and ongoing support, communication with families, and staff are well trained and supervised.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research, according to Klenke (2008), "the principle question of reliability concerns the procedure for achieving truthful interpretation," and "the main question of validity relates to the truthfulness of interpretation" (p. 41). Qualitative research has two significant manners to construct reliability and validity: respondent validation and triangulation. Respondent validation is also known as member checking and was described by Willis (2007) as the process of checking emerging conclusions with participants. I shared my observations and

conclusions with program staff and the Youth Mentors in order to conduct respondent validation, revising my conclusions as necessary.

Triangulation addresses internal validity by using more than one method of data collection and finding the same pattern of results across those different data. In this case study, I used participant observation (field notes), interviews, surveys and written artifacts. I examined the data for consistency of themes across all sources.

Exposing Researcher Values

During this research I have continually inspected my expectations and values as a continuing reminder of the role that my values and beliefs have in inquiry. Ongoing self reflection and discussions with my mentors throughout the course of this study helped me identify and account for the interference of my personal beliefs and the fondness I developed for individual participants in the program. I am an advocate for youth leadership and a fighter against adultism, and, as such, I had to continually make sure I wasn't finding effectiveness in the program out of my desire to have my assumptions confirmed. In sharing my values here I have attempted to take them into account as I share my data and analysis.

Results

In this section, I report on the results of my analysis of the data. I first examine the impact of YLI on the youth participants, and then the programmatic structures that create the environment for leadership development, consistent with the codes I developed for analysis. I discuss the data relevant to each thematic topic as found in a variety of sources, including field notes, interview transcripts, surveys, and YLI program documents (funding proposals, funding reports, evaluations, and public relations materials). This triangulation, or check for consistency of data across all sources, helps validate the findings.

Impact on Participants

In analyzing data I looked at both demonstration of leadership capacities and skills in context of program activities and the participant's self-perception of their capacities in the identified themes. These themes included: communication and interpersonal skills, analytical and critical functioning, decision making skills, sense of personal identity, project management skills, reflective practice, and a sense of empowerment.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

The ability to communicate well with a variety of people is an essential skill for a leader; without exceptional communication and interpersonal skills it is difficult to have influence. A good leader must be both an articulate speaker and an active listener. I found that YLI modeled healthy communication and facilitated learning about communication, rather than taught it as a topic. Activities got youth to practice communication skills, rather than be lectured about them, and in so doing, skills were improved and demonstrated. In a mid-year feedback process, youth participants commented regularly on their increased confidence in speaking to people outside of their "crew," being able to better express themselves, and being more open and able to listen. Many talked about this change being present for them outside of YLI as well, especially in increased class participation (Wilder, 2011c).

From the beginning I observed the Youth Mentors demonstrate communication skills that I wish more adults had. Consistently they displayed active listening and the use of paraphrasing to deepen understanding. Through the survey, 89% of the Youth Mentors reported "a lot" of gain in effective listening skills. They regularly discussed communication related topics; "listening to participants" was always on their lists of goals, along with managing emotions, giving and being open to criticism, and how to read the energy of the room. They knew how to ask for help. The

Youth Mentors also overwhelmingly (90%) claimed that their public speaking skills improved. They were consistently engaged in the facilitation of activities and using their public speaking skills. Meech said his increased public speaking skills enabled him to run for Student Council at his high school (D. Neal, interview, May 11, 2011).

The Youth Mentors understood that leaders sometimes step back and follow. They frequently talked about "steppin' up and steppin' down" and how important it was for them to know when to do either. They knew that part of their role as leaders was to encourage others to "step up." Simone commented, "I interact better with people, I encourage, I can bring people out of their box" (S. Nelson, interview, April 27, 2011). On the survey, 100% of the mentors reported they have gained "a lot" through YLI participation in being able to consider input from all group members. Additionally, 78% communicated "a lot" of gain in ability to create an atmosphere of acceptance. Jua reported that she can always "find something in common with somebody" (J. Xiong, interview, April 27, 2011). Chee spoke about not overusing her power as a Youth Mentor, and other Youth Mentors discussed the importance of putting participants first (C Xiong, interview, April 20, 2011). Through the survey, 89% of the Youth Mentors reported "a lot" of gain in their ability to consider the needs of others.

YLI participants developed an understanding of the need for leaders to be authentic. Many of the activities at YLI are designed to help young people form a personal identity. A strong personal identity and self-awareness are necessary to live and lead authentically. Meech talked about the role of trust, and how it's hard to trust someone who's not being themselves (D. Neal, interview, May 11, 2011). Corina commented that she learned "to lead by example, not being a hypocrite, being myself at all times" (C. Cortes, interview, May 5, 2011). "Show them who you are," Chee advised emerging leaders (C. Xiong, interview, April 20, 2011). Love

defined effective leaders as persons who show their values and principles and use "all the leadership skills through actions" (L. del Puerto, interview, April 25, 2011). A participant reported that they had learned that actions speak louder than words (Wilder, 2011c).

Leading effectively calls for strong interpersonal skills. Participants and mentors alike reported an increase in "out-going-ness." In an internal program evaluation, 80% of participants claimed improvement in their teamwork skills (Valorose, 2010). "Leaders are team players," asserted Meech (D. Neal, interview, May 11, 2011). One participant commented, on the midyear feedback form, that she had learned about friendship (Wilder, 2011c). Youth Mentors regularly discussed strategies to keep the energy up at events. In fact, 100% of them indicated "a lot" of gain in terms of having a friendly personality. Often, as youth were arriving for activities and all hanging out in the kitchen area at Wilder, I would observe the Youth Mentors working the room, greeting and checking in with participants and each other. By spring, I was also observing this behavior among many of the participants.

In addition to being intentional about building peer relationships, the Youth Mentors are aware of their roles as facilitators. They define facilitation as a guiding process and often describe their role as one of guide. One communicates differently as a facilitator; it's all about asking questions and creating a supportive environment. Kenneth described it in this way: "If you teach someone something, you tell them that one + one = two, and then you own it. But if you let them figure out that one + one = two, then they own it" (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011).

The experiential learning environment created at YLI gives participants opportunities to learn about communication from observing staff and Youth Mentors and from opportunities to step up and practice effective communication skills. The supportive environment created

enables young people to take risks and practice these skills, and, in doing so, they become more confident. Each youth is allowed to make that journey in their own way and time. Recognizing its importance, YLI intentionally focuses on building communication skills. As Raddey commented, "Communication is key. That's how everything is gonna get done" (J. Edwards, interview, May 4, 2011).

The development of communication and interpersonal skills is evidenced in the surveys, interviews, internal evaluations, midyear feedback, and observations. Nearly 80% of program participants reported improved team work skills and 100% reported increased out-going-ness. Mentors reported significant gains in their effective listening skills (89%), public speaking skills (90%), ability to consider group input (100%), and ability to create an atmosphere of acceptance (78%). In addition to improved communication and interpersonal skills being self-reported, participants demonstrated active listening, giving and receiving feedback, managing emotions, a commitment to authenticity, and facilitation skills, as found in field notes from a variety of program activities. The experiential programming provided by Wilder creates an environment in which youth are developing communication and interpersonal skills as young leaders.

Analytical and Critical Functioning

"Critical thinking," as defined by Scriven and Paul (1987), "is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action." Good leaders, especially those who wish to use their influence for building community, must be able to exhibit competence in all facets of critical thinking.

The Youth Mentors' ability to conceptualize and design experiential activities that lead to identified learning outcomes reflects good analytical and critical functioning skills. Tre was able to describe the purpose of the mask making activity by reflecting on his own experience as a participant, in which he learned through the creation of his mask how other's perceptions of us match or don't match our internal self-perceptions. He was able to apply these ideas to his own facilitation of the activity. Chee had heard stories about Youth Mentors in previous years making participants do pushups as punishment for not following instructions or being late. She was able to put those stories into the context of her values about learning and facilitation, and made a conscious decision to not follow suit because she believed participants wouldn't listen to her.

Through the survey, mentors reported gains in several skills related to critical functioning: 78% reported "a lot" of gain in their abilities to determine need and 44% gained "a lot" in their ability to use rational thinking. Their commitment to debrief and learn also illustrates critical thinking in action. At the end of each day of a retreat and during Youth Mentor meetings, they actively reflected on what went well, what didn't, and what each of their roles were. They often applied the lessons discussed in debrief sessions to their own leadership and facilitation.

Problem solving skills develop as the result of increased capacity in critical thinking. In a midyear feedback process, 63% of participants reported an increase in problem solving skills and 56% of the Youth Mentors reported "a lot" of gain in their ability to resolve problems. Corina commented on learning that when you work well with others you can come up with many different solutions to a problem and more effectively get the change you want. Role play activities helped Youth Mentors practice and learn about responding to conflict.

Experiential retreat activities like Nuclear Blast, Unequal Distribution, and Egg Drop enabled youth to develop and demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving skills in a group context. In these experiential learning activities, group members must resolve a hypothetical problem with materials representing hypothetical resources given that are intentionally reflective of class and race realities in our society. During the debriefs of cultural simulations, skits presented, and activities like Power Shuffle, youth demonstrated increased understanding of institutional racism and classism on their communities. By expressing their commonalities across cultural groups they demonstrated an empathy that allows them to lead and have influence. Youth reported in the midyear feedback process that they learned how to adapt to certain situations – new cultures, new views and opinions (Wilder, 2011c).

This new cultural awareness allowed them to let go of stereotypes and assumptions and was demonstrated increasingly over the year as they worked together across cultures. Participants commented that they had become more aware of their surroundings, both in terms of being in multi-cultural environments and in terms of a deeper understanding of their communities strengths and weakness. Youth learned and demonstrated critical thinking in the context of Action Team work. In this activity youth conducted community research and needs assessments, found ways that they could contribute toward a solution, and developed project plans. Early in the program year, the Youth Mentors discussed having their own Action Team and doing a service project outside of Minnesota. In the dialogue they expressed a desire to do something sustainable, and thought about safety concerns and financial obligations associated with travel. After thoroughly exploring all the pros and cons, they collectively decided to imbed themselves in participant Action Teams. They had concluded that as Mentors they should be

guiding the newer participants through the process and that a separate Action Team would inhibit their ability to form lasting relationships across the program.

Evidence of increased analytical and critical thinking skills is found across field notes, surveys, interviews, and internal program evaluations. Through the surveys, 100% of Mentors report "moderate" or "a lot" of gain in their abilities to determine need, use rational thinking, and problem solve. Additionally, 63% of participants noted an increase in problem solving skills. Youth applied problem solving skills in experiential group learning activities, in resolving conflicts, planning retreats, and in designing projects for their Action Teams.

Decision Making Skills

Increased analytical capacity leads to good decision making skills. YLI participants were encouraged to learn and demonstrate group decision making skills both in retreat activities and in their Action Teams. An internal evaluation report found that 65% of youth felt they have improved in their ability to take risks and stand up for what is right, which is sometimes a courageous decision (Valorose, 2010). In the same report, 48% reported that they more often think about what will happen as a result of their decisions.

I witnessed Youth Mentors and Action Teams use different consensus decision making techniques, from Fist to Five (a decision making model where group participants show a closed fist indicating total disagreement, or all five fingers extended indicating full support, or some fingers indicating partial support; consensus is reached as the proposal is modified to take into consideration the opinions of those without a full five fingers extended) to groups synthesizing brain storm ideas and creating priorities. Even within an activity to design the t-shirt logo, they demonstrated consensus decision making. The logo evolved as individuals contributed suggestions. Kenneth described decision making at YLI, "It wasn't like majority rules, it was

encouraged within a group that we let everyone know what's happening and make sure everyone's okay with it. No thought here is pushed away" (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011). Collective and consensus decision making processes help youth find authentic voice. The Youth Mentors reported increases in decision making related skills:

Table 1: Gains in Decision Making Skills

Skill	A lot of gain	Moderate gain
I can set priorities	33%	56%
I can consider alternatives	78%	22%
I can select alternatives	56%	44%
I can be flexible	89%	11%

The development of decision making capacities is evidenced in surveys, in-house evaluations, and field notes. Youth participants not only perceived that they thought more often about the consequences of their decisions, they also demonstrated this skill in their activities and team projects. Their demonstrated consistent use of consensus decision making shows that they can make decisions within a team as well as individually. Through the survey, the youth mentors reported "moderate" to "a lot" of gain in their ability to set priorities (89%), their ability to consider alternatives (100%), in their ability to select alternatives (100%), and in their ability to be flexible (100%). Youth at YLI are learning how to employ a variety of decision making skills, important capacities for effective leaders.

Personal Identity

The development of personal identity is a major part of general adolescent development, but particularly important for youth leaders, given that authenticity is a critical characteristic of

effective leaders. YLI activities help youth form identity both as individuals and as communities. Cultural Saturdays, in particular, provide a forum for youth to learn about their ethnicities, their ancestor's struggles, and their current communities' challenges and hopes. Developing an understanding of who they are in the context of their ethnicity allowed for increases in self esteem. In the survey, 67% of the Youth Mentors reported that they have experienced "a lot" of gain in positive self concept. Many youth expressed an increase in ethnic pride and awareness of their culture through the midyear feedback process (Wilder, 2011c). Additionally, 65% of participants reported an increased sense of cultural pride and 76% expressed an increased sense of being part of a community (Valorose, 2010).

Youth described an increase in ethnic pride and additionally an increased ability to accept and affirm people who are different than themselves. Cultural simulations and activities like the Power Shuffle and Speak Outs gave them opportunities to find the commonalities between individuals and cultural groups. Several participants described, through the midyear feedback process, that they had become more open minded and less judgmental (Wilder, 2011c). The Youth Mentors, in preparing for the second retreat whose theme was culture, shared stories of personal encounters with racism and experiences of being an ally. This experience helped them understand why the activities of the second retreat were important to each of them as individuals.

Retreat activities grounded in experiential learning provided an environment for youth to discover their values, strengths and communication styles. One participant described, through the midyear feedback process, that through YLI they found their inner self (Wilder, 2011c). Kenneth stated that "YLI made me be honest with myself – what are my passions?" (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011). As youth go through the brainstorming and synthesizing tasks of creating Action Teams, they have another opportunity to realize what they are passionate about;

this contributes further to their personal identity development. Kenneth claimed, "When you learn more about yourself, it's not adding things; it's just discovering more of who you are" (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011).

All nine of the Youth Mentors reported identifying as a leader, recognizing that they each have influence on participants, in school, and within their families. "I think a lot of people value what I have to say" remarked Tre (T. Alred, interview, April 19, 2011). Many related the fact that having a position of leadership (being designated a Youth Mentor) does not mean that they are better than participants. They understood that how you react to situations demonstrates who you are, as Kenneth commented, "Things come up, and the way you deal with it is really how you define who you are" (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011). Participants also noted, in the midyear feedback process, learning that everyone is a leader and having an increased awareness that they themselves lead.

Evidence of the development of a personal identity is found throughout the data. Through the survey, the Mentors reported experiencing an increased positive self-concept, with 33% reporting "moderate" gains and 67% reporting having gained "a lot." Participants reported an increased sense of cultural pride and an increased sense of being part of a community. Most linked the increased cultural awareness with their increased ability to accept and affirm others. Comments found throughout the field notes confirm that participants learned more about their own passions, values, and communication styles, important facets of one's personal identity.

Project Management Skills

Project Management skills is a broad category that covers a range of skills that contribute to the management of a project. These include abilities to conduct community assessment and issue analysis, mapping, goal setting and planning, committee formation, work plan

development, research methods, marketing, fundraising and committee formation. Youth in YLI learn project management skills experientially; for participants, the Action Teams are the setting in which they practice those skills. Team members worked together to further narrow their interests in topic areas by doing research. Once they had agreed on a more focused issue, they continued to do research that included community needs assessments and mapping. As the teams developed their service project ideas, they needed to set goals and work plans with timelines, form committees and manage the project to completion. Adult staff provided support and coaching, but did not ever actually do any of the work on behalf of the youth. Returning participants, Emerging Leaders, and Youth Mentors provided guidance from their own experiences in previous year's Action Teams. In an internal evaluation report, 59% of participants reported that their project planning skills had improved "a lot" (Valorose, 2010).

The Youth Mentors demonstrated project planning skills within their action teams, and also in a variety of their roles as Youth Mentors. Each retreat was like a small project and they planned the agenda entirely, selecting activities that related to the theme of the retreat as well as the Quote of the Day. Additionally, they planned the fall recruitment efforts and set individual fundraising goals for a matching grant awarded to YLI. Most of the Youth Mentors – eight out of nine - expressed learning a lot about time management and commitment through their Action Team experiences.

Evidence of increased project management skills is found in the surveys, in-house evaluations and the field notes. Nearly 60% of participants report improvement in their project management skills. Additionally, youth comment on learning about research, planning, time management and commitment as a result of programming. The Action Team service projects

created a context for youth to learn, practice and hone project management skills, further promoting skill development.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is an important habit for leaders, because it is through reflection that leaders learn and grow in both self-awareness and awareness of their surroundings. I found reflection to be deeply embedded in the culture at YLI. Experiential learning models have reflection as an intentional build in. It is necessary to reflect to draw out relevancy and lessons learned from any activity. YLI's experiential activities always ended with reflection. Family Group discussions provided participants an opportunity to reflect on each full day's experiences.

The Youth Mentors regularly debriefed after working together, going through a training, and facilitating activities. They demonstrated both self-confidence and humility in their ability to be self-critical and in their ability to appropriately give and receive constructive criticism. Most importantly, I often witnessed them incorporating those stated lessons into their next facilitation or communication. After each working meeting they debriefed through Closing Circles where they shared a word or comment to describe their time together. Facilitation for retreat activities were rehearsed and sometimes videotaped, with peer feedback being provided. They were always asking themselves and each other "what can we do better?" However, this didn't prevent them from celebrating their successes and reflecting on what exactly went right.

The Quote of the Day activity was used at Youth Mentor meetings, Emerging Leader meetings, to begin each day of retreats and to open Cultural Saturdays. All youth got the opportunity to reflect on what the leadership quote meant to them personally and the relevance to current times and situations. Kenneth expressed especially enjoying the Quote of the Day

reflections, claiming he learned from others by reflecting as a group (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011).

Many participants in the midyear feedback process commented on becoming more self aware through YLI. In the survey, 100% of the Youth Mentors reported 'a lot' of increase in being open to change, a characteristic that comes with reflective practice. Corina asserted that she has "learned that sometimes I come off a bit too strong and have to check myself. I notice that I'm really reflective" (C. Cortes, interview, May 5, 2011). Love remarked about how the Boundary Waters Canoe Area trip provided a relaxing, quiet environment in which to learn to be reflective (L. del Puerto, interview, April 25, 2011). Chee demonstrated reflective practice when, after not preparing enough for her facilitation of an activity, she realized that she needed to take responsibility for what she needs to know and be able to get it done (C. Xiong, interview, April 20, 2011).

Reflective practice is evidenced in field notes, interviews, and internal program evaluations. Reflection is woven intentionally into the culture of YLI, and opportunities for individual and group reflection are created with almost every activity. As a result of both program structure and the modeling of reflection by youth and adults alike, reflective practice is a norm at YLI and considered a critical capacity for leadership.

Empowerment

An empowered young person feels they have authentic voice and that their input is valued. They believe they can make a difference in their communities. Without this sense of empowerment, it is difficult for young people to engage and they are susceptible to an internalized oppression of adultism and popular culture. Comments made by participants in the midyear feedback process demonstrate their increased sense of power: I can make a difference

no matter how small or young I am, I have learned how a small group of people can make all the change they want by working together and that this change can start with small actions that have big impacts on communities, when we come together we can do/make something great in the world that affects others, now I really want to become an effective citizen. According to Valorose (2010), YLI participants reported improvements in these beliefs:

Table 2: Improved Sense of Empowerment

Belief	Percent improved
I believe young people can make a difference in the community	83%
I will help my community	79%
I know what I can do to make the community a better place	70%

The Youth Mentors had additional opportunities through YLI to be engaged leaders in community change efforts. Meech talked about being involved in a youth advisory board to the St. Paul Police Department (D. Neal, interview, May 11, 2011). Tre spoke about becoming more confident in his ability to confront injustices when he served on the Supporting Youth Success (SYS) initiative. SYS engaged young leaders to construct policy for out of school time programming. In one of the meetings someone from the Red Lake School District asked for his advice, and actually listened to what he had to say. This action from a non-YLI staff adult had a lasting impact on Tre's sense of empowerment (T. Alred, interview, April 19, 2011). Jua reported that her participation in the Promise Neighborhood planning efforts helped her understand that "we [youth] do matter" because the adults listened (J. Xiong, interview, April 27, 2011). The Youth Mentors were involved, as well, on the planning committee for Peace Jam, an annual community service event that brings a Nobel Peace Laureate to town. Kenneth summed

it up when he commented that "the most common way that people give up their power is by thinking that they don't have any; I have that power" (K. Yang, interview, April 20, 2011).

Leadership is often talked about as positive influence, and different youth will be different kinds of leaders, having unique ways of influencing. "Everyone is a leader." I heard these words spoken by participants, mentors and staff alike. It is a statement that is profoundly empowering. YLI is authentic to this belief in their recruitment processes. The recruitment process screens only for commitment to taking part in all programming activities for the full year.

> We do not screen only for those youth who are "in trouble" or those who are "above average." As a result, we bring together a truly diverse cohort of youth. They are diverse in their interest, ethnic backgrounds, family structures, country of birth, crowd at school, grade point average and so much more. (Wilder, 2010a, p. 2)

Evidence supporting an increased sense of empowerment is found in field notes, surveys, in house evaluations, and interviews. The program design, with its intentionality around authentic youth voice, and the manner in which the adults engage young people assist youth in developing an increased sense of their individual and collective abilities to achieve community change.

Program Supports and Structures

Much of the literature regarding youth leadership development comments on best practices in programming. This includes philosophy, program offerings, staffing, and the presence of well thought out outcome objectives. As I reviewed the data I found the presence of the following program structures and will discuss how each of those ideas is manifested in the program: programming is offered in the context of a cause that is chosen by youth; the program

has defined explicit outcomes; programming happens in a context of skill building through practice, action, membership and modeling; programming is based on youth needs and experiences; student assessment and feedback are provided; learning methods employed vary; follow up and ongoing support are provided; there is communication with families; and staff are well trained and supervised. Evidence that supports the existence of these programming structures is found in field notes, interviews, and program documents.

In the Context of a Cause Chosen by Youth

Youth leadership development in the context of a cause that is chosen by the young people themselves can have a powerful impact on them. A cause provides a mission for youth to rally behind, discovering their own passions and values. Group work creates a context for youth to discover commonalities and a sense of the power of community. YLI's Action Team component occurs in this very context. At the first retreat, youth brainstorm in small groups around specific questions, including "What do I like about my neighborhood/school?" and "What do I wish I could change about my neighborhood/school?" Staff condensed these comments into broad categories like human rights, poverty, teen health, etc. At the kick off meeting for Action Teams the categories are written on large sheets of paper and hung on the walls. Youth move through each category in a world café style, adding ideas for issues under that category heading. Everyone has a chance to peruse the results and then put stickers on their top 5 interest areas. All but the top five are removed and youth again self select into those five Action Teams. As the teams meet separately each week, they conduct research to narrow their focus in that category down, settling on something more specific and designing a service project.

YLI (2011b) reported to McKnight that "one of the keys to this component is the emphasis placed on youth voice. This means that youth choose the issue, and plan and

implement their action with adult partners acting as guides, rather than directors, along the way" (p. 4). In choosing the cause youth are able to find something that inspires them to action, leading to higher engagement. The fact that they are given authentic voice and decision making power sends a powerful message to young people that their opinions do count. This is carried beyond Action Teams, where the Mentors and Emerging Leaders have significant voice and decision making power in planning retreats and activities. YLI has embraced this important aspect of youth leadership development programming.

Explicit Outcomes

Non-profit organizations are increasingly outcome driven. That is a good thing because when an organization has explicit outcome objectives they have a focus and can be strategic within that focus. Organizations with strong outcome measures can be much more intentional about how programming produces those outcomes. YLI tracks the following program goals:

1. Develop youth's understanding of themselves and their cultures,
2. Equip youth with the knowledge, skills and qualities needed for leadership,
3. Encourage youth's appreciation for the culture of others and promote cross-cultural leadership,
4. Build youth leadership through meaningful engagement in real community issues (Wilder, 2010b, p. 2).

These goals are grounded in YLI's framework of leadership development: understanding of self, meaningful connections to others, and commitment to service. YLI's over arching goal, or mission statement, is to prepare a new generation of strong, principled, and effective young leaders with diverse racial and cultural backgrounds to work in diverse community settings.

YLI primarily tracks these outcomes through self-reported information gathered from youth surveys that include open-ended questions and participant evaluations of Youth Mentors. Staff and Mentors use the program goals to create and improve program activities. YLI's commitment to being outcome driven allows them to be intentional in their programming. Their goals are limited to leadership development and not necessarily on broader community impact. It might be helpful to develop measures for the community impact resulting from Action Team service projects.

In the Context of Skill Building

Effective leaders must possess certain skills; many of those were discussed in a previous section. Adults engaged in leadership development often have a place in work or community where they get to practice the skills they are learning in their development program. Reflecting on these "try it on" moments create learning and growth opportunities for that working adult. I've further broken skill building down into four specific context areas where it occurs for YLI youth: practice, action, membership, and modeling.

Practice. Opportunities for authentic leadership practice are woven throughout the program design. All the participants have opportunities to practice leadership skills in the Action Teams as roles are rotated among members and Youth Mentors consciously "step down" and encourage participants to "step up". It is in the Action Team context that youth learn about facilitation, doing research, analysis, organizing and planning by actually doing it, with only

guidance from the staff. The retreat activities also provide participants opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills.

The Emerging Leaders take on increased responsibility for leadership as second year participants. They learn and practice facilitating icebreakers, energizers, and closing activities for Cultural Saturdays. They facilitated a makeup retreat and have co-facilitated, with Youth Mentors, mini Leadership Academies at local middle schools and the Wilder Foundation. The Emerging Leaders are also active members of Action Teams.

The Youth Mentors have a role that creates even more leadership practice as they plan and facilitate all retreat activities. Simone claimed that retreats, and the actual practice of leadership skills, has had the biggest impact on her skill development (S. Nelson, interview, April 27, 2011). Youth Mentors regularly serve on a variety of other community boards as well, including the youth policy advisory board, SYS, the Promise Neighborhood Advisory Board and the Peace Jam Planning Committee, giving them opportunities to be actual leaders in community based settings. These are great practice contexts because they are outside of the YLI family safety; practicing skills in these settings positively impacts confidence.

Action. The Action Team activities provide an action oriented context for skill development as the youth are designing community service projects that are actions intended to alleviate or illuminate a community issue. I also observed YLI youth engage in action outside of that context. Some of the Youth Mentors participated in the Children's Defense Fund's March and Rally for Children and Youth at the Minnesota State Capitol in October, 2010. There was discussion among the youth regarding changes proposed for St. Paul high schools and how they might bring their opinions as students to the school board. When a KDWB radio DJ sang an

overtly racist song about Hmong people on air, YLI youth used Facebook to discuss the situation, circulate petitions, and information about rallies.

Membership. A strong sense of belonging can be very powerful in the development of young people generally and in supporting the development of youth leaders. YLI is designed to run the school year and participants are required to commit for that whole year. Staff assert that this year-long commitment allows youth to develop trusting relationships with adult staff, and lasting relationships with one another. There are additional features of YLI that promote a sense of belonging, including the creation this year of a YLI Facebook group. This Facebook page provided a forum for discussions, announcements, reminders, and check-ins throughout the year among all those involved in YLI.

Experiential activities at the retreats that dealt with trust, team work and community fostered a sense of membership. Meech recalled how the candle lighting activity made him care for the participants even more, "It made me closer to them as a family" (D. Neal, interview, May 11, 2011). The closing activity of the final retreat involved all members of the YLI family giving each other whispered affirmations while tying string bracelets around their wrists. It created a powerful, emotionally charged sense of family and belonging.

Youth Mentors are evaluated by the participants in addition to staff. Participants also play a role in nominating peers for consideration for the following year's Youth Mentor team. This circular accountability flattens the power structure and contributes to the sense of unity as well. "I felt like I had a family, like I was at home," commented Corina when talking about YLI's impact on her as a person (C. Cortes, interview, May 5, 2011).

Modeling. The idea that influence is as much about what you do as what you say is shared among YLI participants. Activities that lead to identity development, often also explore

the differences between how people perceive themselves vs. how they are perceived by others. The mask making activity involves a partner creating the outside of the mask to reflect their perceptions of that individual, and the individual youth decorates the inside of the mask to reflect self-perception. The Speak Out session creates an opportunity for youth to model who they are outside of ethnic stereotypes and assumptions.

Because youth have not been allowed to see themselves as leaders in the broader society they don't always recognize when they are acting as leaders. YLI has an "I See a Leader" comment box, where throughout the year all are encouraged to fill out the form every time they see someone acting as a leader. This program component reinforces the idea of leaders as role models because it is grounded in behavior, not knowledge.

The idea of role modeling is discussed in more depth at Emerging Leaders and Youth Mentor meetings where a context is provided for these youth to reflect on their own behavior. Jua reported developing an awareness that she is a role model particularly for other Hmong girls (J. Xiong, interview, April 27, 2011). Tre expressed awareness that he is definitely always being watched (T. Alred, interview, April 19, 2011). Staff and volunteers role model active listening and positive communication and most especially, through program design, model an appreciation for youth voice.

YLI's program design intentionally provides youth with opportunities to build important skills in the context of practice, action, membership and modeling. Their commitment to authentic voice creates opportunities for young leaders to practice skills in the context of community action and service. Additionally, they create a supportive environment that takes into account the role of belonging and the importance of role modeling as a teaching/learning method.

Programming is Based on Youth Needs and Experiences

Youth Leadership Development programming must focus on the developmental needs and readiness of young people to assume increased leadership roles. YLI has intentionally created multiple program tracks that ensure that each youth involved in the program is given the fullest opportunity to share their ideas, skills, and talents. "As their desire and ability increase so does their level of leadership and engagement" (Wilder, 2010a, p. 4).

Participants commit to engage in all programming components for the year. Through these experiences they build skills, and their beliefs in their abilities to be leaders, and experience taking action in the community. Activities are designed to push youth outside of their comfort zone to facilitate deep learning. No one is forced into participation, but rather strongly encouraged. Youth "step up" as their knowledge and confidence increase.

The Emerging Leaders, are primarily in their second or third year of involvement, and are given a higher set of expectations. They are given the opportunity to reflect on how they can best support first year participants, learn from the mentors, and contribute to program success. They practice their skills by facilitating energizers, ice breakers, closings at YLI activities and make up retreats. Some of the Emerging Leaders have co-facilitated mini Leadership Academies in the broader community.

Youth Mentors, program veterans, take on significant leadership and responsibility in the program. They develop the screening criteria used to select new Youth Mentors from the pool nominated by participants. They complete an in-depth application and interview process. If selected they must commit to YLI on a greater level, starting with a weeklong trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Upon returning they take part in Mentor Boot Camp, a weeklong intensive training on facilitation, learning styles, and communication. The Youth Mentors meet

weekly throughout the year and receive ongoing training in facilitation, to design and plan the Leadership Retreats, and facilitate those retreats.

YLI has taken into consideration the developmental needs and readiness of young people in their tiered participation design. Youth are encouraged to step up and engage more deeply as they demonstrate readiness. YLI is a very young program – only five years old, and is just now beginning to be called to develop a specific role for alumni. This will be important as there is some confusion among the youth participants and Youth Mentors regarding the role of alumni who return as volunteers.

Student Assessment and Feedback Are Provided

It is important for any developing leader to have opportunities for feedback and to set goals for growth. Student feedback is a component of YLI, although it is more strongly provided for Emerging Leaders and Youth Mentors than participants. Staff and mentors provide feedback to participants individually and informally throughout the course of the program year. Acknowledgment is provided through the "I See a Leader" box, but since these are not seen by the recipients until graduation, they may not be timely enough to have a great impact. The Emerging Leaders are paired up with adults from the YLI Community Advisory Committee who act as mentors and provide regular coaching.

At the close of each Leadership Retreat the participants fill out Performance Evaluations on the Youth Mentors. The compiled information is shared with each individual mentor and they conduct a group debrief celebrating successes and creating learning opportunities from identified weaknesses. In addition the Youth Mentors meet one-on-one quarterly with staff to conduct Personal Development Check-ins. In these sessions personal leadership goals are established and reviewed, successes and challenges in meeting those goals are identified, needed staff and

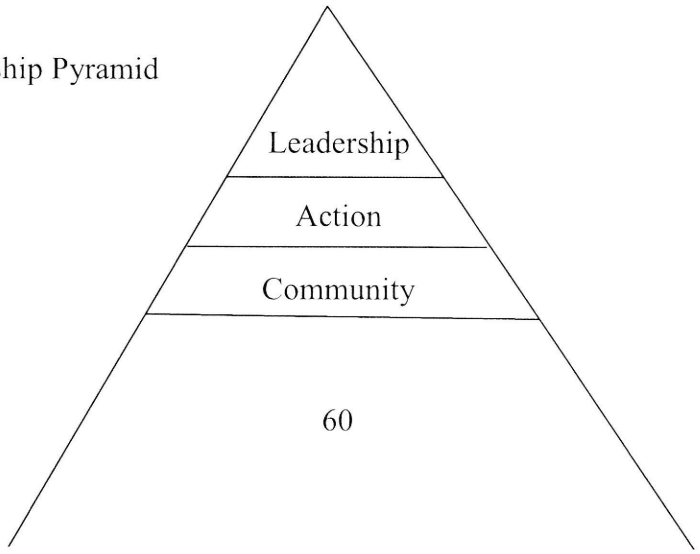
program supports are identified, as well as training topics, and finally action steps within the goals are set.

Evidence for the presence of student assessment and feedback being provided is found primarily in the field notes (both observations and brief informal interviews with staff) and program documents. Data gathered through formal and informal interviews with Mentors and participants demonstrates that youth are aware and appreciate this component of the program. Assessment and feedback are important for any leader, but are particularly helpful for young developing leaders.

Learning Methods Vary

YLI employs a variety of learning activities that are developmentally appropriate for adolescents. This is important as young people have a variety of primary learning styles. In addition, being able to facilitate learning about a single concept in multiple ways reinforces understanding. The learning activities offered through YLI include experiential group activities, personal reflection and goal setting, practice opportunities to take leadership, and the hands on skill building through Action Team service projects in the community. The Youth Mentors experience some additional and varied learning environments that include a 10 day trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. During Mentor Boot Camp they engage in role plays and complete a scavenger hunt in the neighborhood based on the six building blocks of the YLI Leadership Pyramid:

Figure 1: YLI Leadership Pyramid



Culture

Character

Learning

YLI has integrated into its programming a variety of learning methods that are developmentally appropriate for adolescents as evidenced in program documents (curriculum manuals, proposals and reports) and in field notes. Their use of a variety of learning methods and activities creates an environment where everyone, regardless of their primary learning style, has an opportunity to learn and grow as a leader.

Follow up and Ongoing Support

Evidence of follow up and ongoing support is found primarily in field notes, observations made and the stories told by youth and staff alike. Because YLI is grounded in relationships, ongoing support is easily facilitated. Staff and youth regularly engage in informal check-ins. Youth seek advice from staff for personal struggles, although it's not the advice as much as the opportunity to be listened to that most impacts youth. Life coach is just one of the roles YLI staff play.

The weekly Scholarshop programming provides academic support to YLI youth. Homework help and tutoring are available. Through Scholarshop, staff are able to provide opportunities for youth to learn about the college application and admission process and how to apply for financial aid and private scholarships. Several college campus tours are arranged over the program year. Program staff are regularly writing recommendation letters for youth's college and scholarship applications.

Staff and participants alike maintain ongoing relationships with program alumni, who return as volunteers and interns or stay connected through social media. In this way, follow up extends informally beyond formal participation.

YLI is intentional about leveraging relationships to promote follow up and ongoing supports. The program demonstrates, as evidenced through field notes, interviews, and program documents, a commitment to this level of individual support. The increase in the number of participants during the 2010-2011 program year could have easily overwhelmed the small team of paid staff. YLI effectively used volunteer engagement as a way to compensate for the higher youth to staff ratios.

Communication with Families

I observed somewhat limited communication with families at YLI. At the start of the year they held informational meetings for parents; in addition multiple one-on-one phone calls were made. In January a newsletter titled *YLI Happenings* was distributed among families and volunteers. This newsletter contained updates on YLI programming, important upcoming dates, and news about community partnerships. Some parents and family members attended the spring Inspiration Dinner, but primarily those in attendance were honorees. At this youth organized event, YLI youth were invited to honor an adult who had inspired them. Volunteers, teachers, coaches, and staff were among the other adults honored. In March, the family Action Team sponsored a Youth and Parents night with the goals of increasing parent engagement and strengthening parent-child relationships. Unfortunately, fewer than 12 youth plus family members attended. There were parents and family present at the YLI Graduation event. It appeared that communication with family was most intense at the enrollment phase and at the end to celebrate completion. Youth often described the barrier to program involvement that was

created when family didn't understand the time commitment required. "It's also really hard for me to explain to my uncle why I always have to go somewhere or why I always come home late" (Wilder, 2011c). More regular and intense communication with families might increase family investment in their child's participation, thereby removing the level of increased stress experienced by youth with family demands.

Evidence for family engagement and communication is found in field notes and program documents (public relations materials, proposals and reports). YLI engages families on a limited basis, but is evaluating those efforts and adapting to increase family communication and commitment.

Staff Are Well Trained and Supervised

Program staff have college degrees, including Masters level credentials, in youth development, education and leadership fields. In addition to having strong youth work backgrounds, there is a commitment to service. One of the staff is an Americorps Promise Fellow, and another a former Fellow. In the fall of 2010, staff attended three specific professional development opportunities: "*Increasing Youth Participation in Planning Teams,* the Center for Pathways to Positive Futures conference, and *Promising Practices in Youth Mentoring: Implications of Emerging Frameworks*" (Wilder, 2011b, p. 8). Program staff are evaluated annually and set performance and development goals at that time.

Volunteers from the community attend an orientation at the beginning of the year where they review Wilder volunteer policies and their own job description, and learn about effective youth engagement. The discussion about youth engagement includes strategies for mutually creating group rules and expectations, how to create an inclusive environment, and how to let youth do the leading. Volunteers also learn why authentic youth voice is effective and how

culture and action team volunteer coaches can create the most conducive atmosphere. Staff check-in informally, but regularly, with volunteers to provide support and quasi supervision, and gather feedback from volunteers through surveys.

As evidenced in field notes and program documents, YLI is committed to hiring well trained and experienced staff. In addition YLI demonstrates a priority to engage and support a diverse cohort of program volunteers from the community. Staff supervision and development is also a demonstrated concern that is given attention.

Discussion and Implications

In this section, I will discuss the ability of YLI to develop effective youth leaders. I will review the findings related to impact on youth participants as well as the program structures that promote youth leadership development. Additionally I will discuss the implications of these findings on program design/best practices, future research, and policy making.

Effective Youth Leadership Development

Did youth become more effective leaders in the activist context? In the case of YLI, I believe so. Yet there is more that drives the success of YLI than just action. It is, as illustrated above, the unique blend of the best practices found in the literature regarding Youth Leadership Development and Positive Youth Development that creates the success of YLI.

Participant Skills and Attitude

The evidence clearly shows that YLI had a positive impact generally on the young participants. It also had positive influence in regards to the development and mastery of core leadership skills. Communication and interpersonal skills improved greatly. The ability to listen, to communicate cross-culturally and cross generationally, and to persuade are skills that YLI

youth gained. Communication skills are linked to several other leadership skills; growth in one area requires examination and growth in another.

YLI youth increased their capacity for analytical and critical functioning. Through a variety of activities they learned how to do research, deconstruct, brainstorm, synthesize, and determine need. They became conscious of the power dynamics at play in the world, and used their increased communication skills to give and receive feedback. As their analytical function improved, so did their capacity for decision making. The YLI youth's communication skills came into play when they practiced building consensus as a primary decision making model.

All these capacities are enhanced by a strong sense of self and an understanding of others. Authenticity enhances communication and decision making skills. YLI youth understood the power of authenticity in leadership. Program activities helped them increase cultural pride and a sense of community. Youth learned about their values and passions, as well as styles of communication and then were encouraged to manifest that in their actions. A reflective practice promotes personal growth and enables authentic lives.

Reflection was one aspect of YLI culture that impressed me a great deal. Individually and collectively, members of the YLI community would draw on their critical thinking skills and debrief an activity, situation, or personal incident. They were humble and open to feedback. And I regularly observed them applying the lessons learned. This is highly unusual given what has been found out about the adolescent brain and the lack of connections between the frontal lobe and the rest of the brain. The YLI youth practiced a focused reflection that was geared toward learning and growth; they seldom over processed a situation.

YLI participants, as shown in the evidence, feel a sense of empowerment, and describe gaining that through program activities. They believe they can make a difference and that they

do indeed have a voice. A sense of power will serve them as they seek to create change in their communities and give them the hope to persevere.

Program Structures

Youth do not develop these skills by chance. Program structures, and the intent in crafting those designs, create the optimum environment for leadership skills and attitudes among youth to grow. YLI has incorporated several program strategies and philosophies that allow them to foster those very conditions.

It is important to note the value of group work, particularly in the supportive culture at YLI. In a group context, the supportive relationships among participants and staff allow participants to experiment with new behavior and take risks by trying out new skills (van Linden & Fertman, 1998, p. 127). The level of support and belonging experienced by YLI youth was observed by a volunteer, who himself had considerable experience doing theatre work with youth. He commented that these kids were so *nice*, despite all of their life challenges. Program activities, particularly those that promoted cross-cultural awareness, created an increased sense of empathy among youth participants.

Staff play a key role. The YLI staff's ability to honor and promote youth voice and leadership requires great commitment to dismantling adultism, as well as great patience. As staff model active listening, reflection, and redesign, the youth pick up the skills and the program is able to make quality improvements. Wilder staff are well-trained, support each other and share a philosophy of learning and quality improvement. They are a small staff and sometimes work above and beyond to ensure programming happens. This can lead to burn out so it is important that YLI considers how to engage more adult volunteers or add more official staff as numbers continue to increase.

Authentic voice is important on many levels. It gives opportunities to practice skills, to find personal passions, and be empowered. Clearly, as shown by YLI, programming that facilitates learning within an authentic and action oriented environment creates opportunities for youth to be leaders now, and not just in the future. There is power gained when your voice counts; YLI youth expressed feeling empowered. YLI stands out in its consideration of the readiness of youth and the leveled tiers of programming offered. While the tier structure exists, it does not prevent any individual youth, regardless of role (Participant, Emerging Leader, or Youth Mentor), from taking on additional leadership responsibilities.

YLI uses outcome tracking, not just to satisfy funding requirements, but also to provide information for program quality improvement. The defined outcomes give YLI the opportunity to be intentional about program offerings. YLI employs youth development best practices in their attention to relationship development, focus on strengths, and intentionality around creating belonging. YLI incorporates a variety of learning methods into their curriculum, particularly experiential learning, another tenant of youth development. Role modeling is understood and practiced as a teaching tool. Relationships allow for the authentic assessment, feedback and coaching given to participants.

YLI's programming has evolved even in its short existence. This demonstrates the program's commitment to learning and quality. Perhaps they might consider developing a more regular newsletter for families, opening up communication and investment. They might also look for additional leadership opportunities in the broader community for youth participants to engage in. Love indicated that she saw a difference in her capacity to lead peers vs. lead adults, "There's a difference, it's hard to tell if I could lead an adult" (L. del Puerto, interview, April 25, 2011). I would argue that this is a matter of perception, because I often observed her leading

adults. Perhaps more adult community volunteer presence in Action Teams would create additional experiences for youth where they lead adults and develop more confidence.

Implications

Best Practices

"One size fits all" is not applicable in discussions of leadership development in general, nor is it relevant in the field of Youth Leadership Development. There are many elements to consider when designing an effective youth leadership development program. YLI has demonstrated success in their approach. Organizations and communities looking to create or improve youth leadership development and action would be well served by taking YLI's example and tweaking it as needed to fit local needs. Authentic voice, real life opportunities to practice skills, and decision making power are critical core components,

Future Research

Many youth claimed YLI represented a "life-changing" experience for them. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study of the effect of YLI as the participants go on with post high school life, measuring over time the long term impact of skills and capacities developed in the program. Do youth still practice reflection? Do they still use good communication skills? What other projects/actions have they gotten involved with on college campuses or in their neighborhoods? Do they still feel powerful?

Current research tends to focus either on organizing success and community impact or on the programming structures that are optimum for effective youth leadership development. I argue that more research should be conducted that measures both aspects. It is important to consider the programming that enables youth to be effective leaders and be intentional about creating those structures. But if the world is to consider inviting youth to be present at decision

making tables and give them authentic voice, we must also know how their involvement as leaders in community change efforts actually impacts community. Only then will communities, as MacNeil (2006) argued, see youth leadership as "good for all" (p. 35). SPR's 2003 multi-tiered design to evaluate the Youth Leadership Development Initiative provides a good model for measuring both kinds of outcomes. The project evaluation itself created youth leadership development opportunities by embracing a participatory research method.

Toward a Future Policy

This idea of shedding adultism and creating authentic leadership opportunities is a good one. The positive impact ripples outward. This should be of interest to anyone who is engaged in creating just and compassionate communities that are united across culture and generations to find local solutions, with local resources, for local problems. There are examples of many local change efforts going on across the globe. We don't hear about it on the 10:00 p.m. news. What if such groups made an effort to engage youth as leaders? Would something more sustainable be created? In order to increase youth voice and leadership into our systems, we will likely need to prepare adults as much, if not more, than young people. Adultism is difficult to eliminate. But imagine a world without it.

As barriers to sustaining healthy communities mount, it is imperative that we look for new and different problem solving models. There is a movement of small local responses to local challenges creeping across the globe. The youth development model, with its history of being strength-based, promoting belonging and being community based, has much to offer change seekers. Young people can contribute to the discussion and solution crafting for societal problems. YLI demonstrates that, when youth are engaged appropriately and given authentic voice, they want to be involved. The YLI youth understood that the best change efforts are local

and sustainable. Efforts to organize for positive change must become more intergenerational and more localized in order to be more successful and more sustainable.

I unite with Zeldin and Camino (1999), as well as MacNeil (2006), and argue that young people are assets to our communities, and should be seen and engaged as such. They have the passion, the desire and the capacities to make a difference. We should engage in developing youth leaders, not for tomorrow, but for today. It may be what saves us.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

Youth Leadership Development in the Activism Context: A Case Study of the Wilder Youth Leadership Initiative

CONSENT FORM – MINOR PARTICIPANT

Your child is invited to be in a research study of youth leadership development. Your child was selected as a possible participant because of his/her participation in the Wilder Youth Leadership Initiative. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my master's project in Leadership at Augsburg College. My advisor is Dr. Velma Lashbrook.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of those youth leadership development opportunities that actually go beyond skill development and give youth authentic authority – voice, influence, and decision making – in a social change or activist context.

Procedures:

If you agree for your child to be in this study, I would ask them to complete an interview about what they are learning by participating in the program, to take a brief survey toward the end of their participation in the program, and allow me to observe and take notes during program activities. The interview will be conducted at the Wilder facility and take approximately 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has some risks: First, it might be uncomfortable for your child to be interviewed; Second, being observed during programming might make them self conscious or nervous.

I have been a youth worker for nearly twenty five years and will use my experience and relationship building skills to make your child as comfortable as possible. If necessary I will stop the interview.

There are no direct benefits to participation.

Indirect benefits to participation are a possible contribution to knowledge on youth leadership development.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. They will be secured in a locked cabinet in my home to protect confidentiality. I will present the results at a Colloquium at Augsburg College in the Spring of 2011 and a copy of the project paper will be in the Augsburg College Library. The YLDI program staff and the young people involved in the study will also receive a copy of the final paper. If I publish any other type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. All data (tape recordings, transcriptions, field notes, and surveys) will be kept in a locked file in my home; only my advisor, Velma Lashbrook, and I will have access to the data. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number of people studied.

a. Raw data will be destroyed by June, 2014, per federal law.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your or their current or future relations with Augsburg College, The Wilder Foundation, or the researcher. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time

without affecting those relationships. Your decision to allow your child to participate or not in this research will not affect their participation in the YLDI program.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Susan Phillips. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at phillip1@augsburg.edu or on my cell phone 612.845.1607.

My advisor is Dr. Velma Lashbrook, Assistant Professor in the Masters in Leadership Program. lashbroo@augsburg.edu, 612.330.1150.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of parent or guardian _____

Date_____

Signature of minor subject's assent _____

Date_____

Signature of investigator _____

Date_____

I consent to allow my child to be audio taped

Signature _____

Date_____

I assent to be audio taped (minor)

Signature _____

Date _____

I consent to allow my minor child's quotations in the published document

(parents/guardians)

Signature _____

Date_____

I assent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published document (minor)

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B: Survey

YOUTH LEADERSHIP LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCALE

What leadership skills have you improved because of your _____ involvement? Please answer each item by circling the number that you feel represents your gain for each skill. Please answer every question.

As a result of my _____ experiences I:

	No Gain 0	Slight Gain 1	Moderate Gain 2	A Lot of Gain 3	Only for Coding
1. Can determine needs	0	1	2	3	_____
2. Have a positive self-concept	0	1	2	3	_____
3. Can express feelings	0	1	2	3	_____
4. Can set goals	0	1	2	3	_____
5. Can be honest with others	0	1	2	3	_____
6. Can use information to solve problems	0	1	2	3	_____
7. Can delegate responsibility	0	1	2	3	_____
8. Can set priorities	0	1	2	3	_____
9. Am sensitive to others	0	1	2	3	_____
10. Am open-minded	0	1	2	3	_____
11. Consider the needs of others	0	1	2	3	_____
12. Show a responsible attitude	0	1	2	3	_____
13. Have a friendly personality	0	1	2	3	_____
14. Consider input from all group members	0	1	2	3	_____
15. Can listen effectively	0	1	2	3	_____
16. Can select alternatives	0	1	2	3	_____
17. Recognize the worth of others	0	1	2	3	_____
18. Create an atmosphere of acceptance	0	1	2	3	_____
19. Can consider alternatives	0	1	2	3	_____
20. Respect others	0	1	2	3	_____
21. Can solve problems	0	1	2	3	_____
22. Can handle mistakes	0	1	2	3	_____
23. Can be tactful	0	1	2	3	_____
24. Can be flexible	0	1	2	3	_____
25. Get along with others	0	1	2	3	_____
26. Can clarify my values	0	1	2	3	_____
27. Use rational thinking	0	1	2	3	_____
28. Am open to change	0	1	2	3	_____
29. Have good manners	0	1	2	3	_____
30. Trust other people	0	1	2	3	_____
				Grand Total	_____

Appendix C: Program Activities

Leadership Retreats: Youth attend three multicultural retreats facilitated by Youth mentors where they explore concepts of leadership, strengthen cross-cultural relationships, and participate in experiential learning activities that focus on working effectively with others. Youth also discover their values, aspirations, strengths, and styles.

Cultural Sessions: Youth meet monthly between retreats in culturally specific cohorts. Aided by a Cultural Coach, youth explore their culture and heritage and its impact on their leadership style and personal development. They explore stereotypes and prejudices, share their experiences, learn about the contributions of their cultural group, and find ways to be a change agent in their cultural community.

Action Teams: Youth participate in weekly multicultural teams that focus on providing service to the community. The teams are organized around community issues that the youth choose. Each team explores the issue they have selected and develops a service project to address the issue. Youth gain real life experience in project planning and implementation, cross-cultural communication, and teamwork.

School Support: Youth discuss the importance of education and receive structured support based on an Individual Education Plan developed with each youth. Youth set goals and begin preparing for higher education through attendance at monthly workshops provided in partnership with Scholarshop, a program of Scholarship America.